**Stoke Environment Group Annual Review 2022 – 2023**

This review covers the period since the last Annual General Meeting that was held on Wednesday 12 October 2022.

**Overall**

Stoke Environment Group continues to undertake work in the community in line with its objectives. The balance of these activities have been related to the environment. Some activities, however, have been undertaken to improve wellbeing and knowledge – both of which have a positive impact on the environment and tackling climate change.

Whilst the attendance at monthly meetings remains stable, the distribution list has grown to over 100 ‘members’.

**Activities**

At the October 2022 meeting, it was agreed to continue to contribute to activities that improved our environment and which, in turn, helps to tackle the effects of climate change. SEG regularly and routinely engages with the Parisch Council. It has also attempted to engage with other community groups but this has been less productive.

IU attended the 2022 Somerset Resilience Day on 13 October. Whilst this was not SEG-specific, a number of interesting presentations had relevance to SEG’s objectives – including the effects of flooding. IU provided the PC with a written report.

KH attended the SCOP22 day at Somerton with a representative of the Parish Council.

Oversight of the Village Hall hedge continues. The hedge plants are growing rapidly and most of the guards and stakes will shortly be removed. Some weeding will be necessary, but it will be accepted that grasses and other species will naturally populate the hedge line. Losses were small (much less than the 10% expected) and where they occurred, they have largely been replaced. There are still one or two gaps and IU will contact RtL for replacements during the 23/24 planting season.

A large number of wildflower bulbs were planted in the autumn and many of these emerged in the Spring 23. Volunteers planted several hundred bulbs in less than half a day – including wild daffodils, crocus, snowdrops and wood anemone. A member of SEG and a local resident also donated primulas which were subsequently placed in the Spinney.

Some coppicing in the Spinney was carried out by volunteers. This mainly involved hazel, but also blackthorn. Ground clearing including the removal of copious quantities of goose grass was also undertaken. Bird boxes were put into the trees but no sighting of residents yet! Ground cover is improving in quality, and this is attracting a variety of insects. The grass cutting contractors have been very helpful in not mowing right up to the edge – thus providing feeding opportunities and shelter from predators. No sight of slow worms yet!

IU attended a number of online meetings with CSE and others related to energy saving opportunities.

A number of people got together to learn apple tree grafting – led by AB. This was a successful exercise for most – but not all!!

Envirofair 23 was held on Saturday 3 June. This was the third such event as was a great success. All but one organisation appeared on the day (30 in total) and with good weather, attendance was very much higher than previous years. All organisations involved asked to be contacted prior to the event in 2024. Feedback by all was very positive.

With the agreement of the Allotment Committee and the Parish Council, SEG took over the management of the Community Orchard. A grant from National Grid was submitted to undertake work in the Orchard and this was successful. A new picnic bench and compost bins have been installed, the grass has been mowed, weeds removed from the fence line and trees mulched. Further work to be undertaken includes planting wild flowers, espalier trees, soft fruit (we have been offered some raspberry and strawberry plants) and installation of raised beds and wildlife habitats. All work is to be completed by 31 December in accordance with the terms of the grant.

KH organised the latest refurbishment of the old telephone box in Willey Road. It is currently being used as a collection point for blister packs. Further ideas are welcome. The small piece of rough ground adjacent to the box has been replanted.

KH is also coordinating the refurbishment of the bus stop outside the Royal Oak. This is to be repainted and re-glazed and equipped with a notice board.

The Footpath Group continue to do sterling work developing relationships with land owners and SC officers. Local paths are now being routinely surveyed and cleared with issues being reported to the County Footpath Officer and Parish Council. Guides have been written and distributed around the village. A number of residents have commented on the improvements seen.

A Saturday morning event arranged with the SWT and Somerset Botany Group enabled a few of us to understand more about our local plants. A survey of species was undertaken around the Village Hall and results uploaded to iNaturalist.

Similarly, a Bat Detective evening was held on 2 September. This was also coordinated by SWT and 28 people attended the evening. A member of Somerset Bat Group told us about the characteristics of the bats we might find. Divided into six groups and sent off to different areas of the village, over 100 sightings were made using electronic bat detectors. Results were recorded and superimposed on a map of the area and uploaded to iNaturalist.

**Community Woodland**

SEG continues to stay in touch with the landowner and agent of one piece of land in the centre of the village. The tenancy will be reviewed in 2024 and SEG, on behalf of the community, has formally registered its interest.

A letter to a number of other local land owners and an appeal at a PC meeting have failed to elicit even an acknowledgement, let alone a positive response.

**Communication and Engagement**

IU met with the then interim Head (Mr Barney Ryecroft) of SSG School. He stated that the school will get involved more with SEG following the appointment of a permanent Head. They will get in touch with regard their contribution at Envirofair 24. [Note: Mr Ryecroft has recently been formally appointed to the position]

SEG was approached by a student of Strode College who wanted to film some of SEWG’s work as part of a project on Community Action. IU met with the College Staff to understand how best to support the student. Izzy visited SSG on two occasions to film and interview – including Bryony from Somerset Wildlife Trust. Izzy’s video was shown at Envirofair 23. The College has since been in touch and requested that we be contacted again for assisting future students.

A local young man asked if he could volunteer with SEWG as part of his Duke of Edinburgh’s Bronze Award. Jake helped with setting up at the Envirofair 23 and the Open Garden event at Hillcrest. He also undertook several litter picking sessions along the lanes. We have now been approached by another young man undertaking his Gold Award.

IU continues to write articles on SEG and general environment and climate change matters for the Parish News Magazine (monthly) and the Stoke News (quarterly). A written report on SEG’s work is also sent to the Parish Council in advance of its monthly meetings.

IU was interviewed on BBC Radio Somerset prior to the Envirofair 23.

DE has undertaken a lot of work on the website and FB posts and designing, printing and displaying posters. This is an area that has been worked on this year and is getting SEG recognised.

KH has made significant progress developing the Round Robin SEG Newsletter. Two editions have been published to date. Ideas on content welcomed.

NW has helped design and purchase flags and banners for events attended by SEG. These additions will help raise the group’s profile.

**Community Plan**

IU worked closely with the Community Plan Management Team in the analysis of the results of the CP residents’ questionnaire. IU invited the Steering Group to support the ‘Collective Commitment’ contained in the CP. This was subsequently signed by a large number of community group representatives.

A number of actions from the Community Plan have been identified. Some of the actions would appear to fall within SEG’s remit and it is proposed these be picked up in our future plans. It is unclear at present if any other community groups are willing to act on the actions.

Ian Upshall

13 October 2023